

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EUR-12 EA-07 IO-13 ACDA-07 OMB-01
TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
AID-05 DHA-02 EB-07 /110 W
-----051625Z 018338 /41

R 051249Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3206
INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY KABUL
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 6499

EINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR IN BG
SUBJECT: INDO-BANGLADESHI RELATIONS: SATISFACTION AND DISMAY

SUMMARY: MEA JOINT SECRETARY FOR BANGLADESH TOLD
EMBOFFS THAT THE FARKKA TACHNICAL-LEVEL TALKS WOULD BEGIN
IN NEW DELHI MAY 6. HE SAID THAT THE RECENT BORDER TALKS
IN NEW DELHI HAD GONE WELL AND SPECULATED THAT WITHIN
A FEW MONTHS THE BANGLADESHIS WOULD NO LONGER HAVE REASON
TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT MAJOR BORDER INCIDENTS. IN COMPARING
THE BORDER AND FARAKKA PROBLEMS, DUBE WAS MORE OPTIMISTIC
ABOUT RESOLVING THE ORMER BECAUSE THE LATTER WAS THE
KIND OF TECHNICAL ISSUE OVER WHICH TALKS CAN EASILY STALL.
REGARDING THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN BANGLADESH
ELIMINATING SECULARISM AND SUBSTITUTING "ABSOLUTE TRUST AND
FAITH IN THE ALMIGHTY ALLAH, " DUBE SAID THAT THE GOI HAD MADE
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IT CLEAR "IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS" TO THE BDG THAT IT CONSIDERED
THE CHANGE " MOST UNFORTUNATE". BECAUSE OF THE CHANGE,
DUBE RAISED THE SPECTER OF AN "EXODUS" OF THE
INSECURE MINORITIES. HOWEVER, DUBE ALSO SAID AT
ANOTHER POINT IN THE CONVERSATION THAT THE GOI HAD STRIVEN
TO CANVEY TO GENERAL ZIA AT THE HIGHEST POLITICAL LEVEL
THAT THERE WAS "NO QUESTION OF THE NONACCEPTABILITY"

OF THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT " LET ALONE THE QESITION
OF DESTABILIZATION". END SUMMARY.

1. FARAKKA: TECHNICAL LEVEL TALKS ON FARAKKA WILL
BEGIN IN NEW DELHI MAY 6, MRA JOIN SECRETARY FOR
BANGLADESH, M. DUBE, TOLD EMBOFFS MAY 4 THAT THE INDIANS
WERE PLANNING UPON A FULL WORKING WEEK OF TALKS. THE
GOI SIDE WILL BE LED BY FOREIGN SECRETARY JAGAT MEHTA, AND THE
BANGLADESH DELEGATION BY B. M. ABBAS, ADVISOR TO THE
PRESIDENT ON FLOOD CONTROL AND IRRIGATION. WITH THE
EXCEPTION OF BANGLADESH DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER REZAUL KARIM,
DUBE THOUGHT THAT THE BANGLADESH TEAM WOULD BE A
TECHNICAL ONE. REGARDING THE DACCA TALKS AT WHICH THE ORAL
UNDERSTANDING WAS REACHED, DUBE WAS RETICENT. HE DID NOT
DISPUTE PRESS REPORTS OF AN ALLOCATION 22,500 CUSECS OF
LEAN SEASON FLOW TO THE CALCUTTA PORT, BUT IMPLIED THAT OTHER
ISSUES, INCLUDING THE QUESTION OF THE LENGTH OF THE LEAN
SEASON, HAD BEEN LEFT OPEN. DUBE'S ONLY COMMENT ABOUT
OFFICIAL AND PRESS CRITICISM IN WEST BENGAL OF THE DACCA
UNDERSTANDING WAS THAT IT WOULD NOT MAKE MATTERS
ANY EASIER FOR THE GOI IN COMING TO A DETAILED AGREEMENT.
IN COMPARING THE BORDER PROBLEMS AND THE FARAKKA DISPUTE,
DUBE SAID THAT HE WAS MORE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FORMER
THAN THE LATTER. FARAKKA WAS THE SORT OF TECHNICAL
PROBLEM, HE SAID, WHERE TALKS CAN EASILY STALL.
ONE OF HIS CONCERNS WAS THE BANGLADESHIS' WILLINGNESS TO
PERMIT JOINT OBSERVATION OF THE RIVER FLOW ON THEIR SIDE,
INDIA, HE SAID, WAS AGREEABLE TO SUCH A PROCEDURE ON ITS
TERRITORY.

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2. BORDER TALKS: DUBE SAID THAT THE BORDER TALKS IN
NEW DELHI WHICH RECENTLY CONCLUDED HAD GONE WELL. THE GOI
MADE IT CLEAR, HE SAID, THAT IT WOULD BE MORE ALERT AND
WOULD COOPERATE IN EFFORTS TO KEEP MISCREANTS ON THE
BANGLADESH SIDE OF THE BORDER. IF MISCREANTS
CROSSED OVER, THE GOI WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO FIND AND
IDENTIFY THEM AND "ATTEMPT TO PERSUADE" THEM TO RETURN
TO THEIR OWN TERRITORY. DUBE SAID THAT THERE
WOULD BE NEITHER JOINT OPERATIONS BETWEEN THE RESPECTIVE
BORDER FORCES NOR COORDINATED ACTIVITIES, BUT THAT THERE
WOULD BE "AN EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AT THE SECTOR LEVEL".
WHILE HE THOUGHT THAT SUCH INCIDENTS AS COWLIFTING ACROSS THE
BORDER WOULD CONTINUE TO BE A PROBLEM, DUBE BELIEVED
THAT THE "MAJOR CONCERN" OF THE BANGLADESHIS (BY IMPLICATION
ARMED BORDER RAIDS) WOULD BE RESOLVED WITHIN A FEW MONTHS.

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3. DUBE SAID THAT THE GOI MADE IT CLEAR TO THE BANGLADESHIS THAT IT COULD NOT FORCE THE BANGLADESHI DISSIDENTS IN CALCUTTA TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMELAND. THEIR RETURN WOULD DEPEND UPON THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN BANGLADESH AND THE ABILITY OF THE BDG TO "PERSUADE" THEM TO RETURN. DUBE ESTIMATED THAT THERE WERE BETWEEN 30 AND 40 POLITICAL LEADERS IN CALCUTTA, INCLUDING FORMER MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT BUT NO EX-MINISTERS, AND TWO HUNDRED PLUS OTHERS SUCH AS YOUTH, SUTDENT AND LABOR LEADERS. DUBE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THE NUMBER OF SUCH BANGLADESHIS IN CALCUTTA MIGHT INCREASE BUT HE DID NOT EXPLAIN THIS REMARK.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN BANGLADESH: DUBE SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN BANGLADESH DROPPING SECULARISM AND SUBSTITUTING FAITH
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IN ALLAH WAS "ILL ADVISED". THE GOI, HE SAID, HAD MADE IT CLEAR TO THE BDG RECENTLY "IN NO UNCERTAIN

TERMS" THAT IT CONSIDERED THE CHANGE "MOST UNFORTUNATE". DUBE HASTENED TO ADD THAT AT THE SAME TIME THE INDIANS MADE IT CLEAR THAT THEY WERE NOT INTERFERING IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF BANGLADESH. DUBE COMMENTED THAT THE GOI HAD BEEN SURPRISED THAT THE CHANGE CAME SO SOON AFTER THE VISIT OF JAGJIVAN RAM. CATALOGING HIS REASONS FOR CONCERN, DUBE SAID THAT THE CHANGE MADE TEN MILLION PEOPLE SECOND-CLASS CITIZENS BECAUSE THEY COULD NOT ASCRIBE TO A TENET OF THE CONSTITUTION. HE SPECULATED THAT THE INSECURITY OF THE MINORITIES WOULD INCREASE IF OTHER STEPS WERE TAKEN SUCH AS AMENDING THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS SECTION OF THE CONSTITUTION GUARANTEEING EQUALITY OR REQUIRING THAT ONLY MUSLIMS COULD BE OFFICE HOLDERS. HE THEN RAISED THE SPECTRE THAT SUCH CHANGES WOULD LEAD TO AN "EXODUS", WHICH INDIAN WOULD TREAT AS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER. THE GOI, DUBE SAID, WAS MOST CONCERNED ABOUT THE USE THAT RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS MIGHT MAKE OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. ASKED IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY INDICATION OF THIS SO FAR, DUBE SAID THAT THERE HAD NOT BEEN BUT THAT THE ONLY ONES WHO HAD WELCOMED THE CHANGE WERE THE RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS. THE POLITICIANS HAD NOT. WHEN DUBE WAS IMPLYING THAT SOME EXODUS WAS INEVITABLE, AN EMBOFF NOTED IN PASSING THAT SOME HINDUS IN BANGLADESH HAD EXPRESSED THE VIEW IN THE PAST THAT THEY WOULD HAVE A CLAIM AS A MINORITY TO THE PROTECTION OF THE GOVERNMENT IF AN ISLAMIC STATE WAS DESIGNATED. DUBE TOOK OFFENSE THAT SUCH AN ATTITUDE COULD EVEN BE CONSIDERED, LIKENED IT TO THE OLD IMPERIALIST ARGUMENT TOWARD THEIR COLONIES, AND SAID THERE WAS NO VALIDITY IN IT AND IT WAS NOT WORTHY OF MENTION. BY THE SAME TOKEN DUBE REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE HAD BEEN ANY INFORMED SPECULATION PREVIOUSLY IN BANGLADESH THAT THE GOVERNMENT MIGHT GIVE GREATER OFFICIAL RECOGNITION TO THE ROLE

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OF ISLAM IN THE SOCIETY.

5. ACCEPTABILITY OF THE BDG: IN DISCUSSING INDO-BANGLADESH RELATIONS IN GENERAL, DUBE SAID THAT THE GOI HAD STRIVEN TO CONVEY TO GENERAL ZIA AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL THAT THERE WAS "NO QUESTION OF THE NONACCEPTABILITY" OF THE BANGLADESH GOVERNMENT, "LET ALONE THE QUESTION OF DESTABILIZATION". HE REMARKED THAT THE GOI HAD EMPHASIZED THIS EVEN THOUGH EVENTS INSIDE BANGLADESH WERE NOT ENCOURAGING. DUBE ATTRIBUTED THE RECENT AGREEMENTS TO THE POLITICAL WILL OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS. BUT, HE SAID, THAT GOI HAD ALWAYS BEEN CONCERNED THAT INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS BE MAINTAINED TO FACILITATE IMPROVE-

MENT. THUS, ALTHOUGH THERE WAS NOT MUCH TRADE, THE
TRADE AGREEMENT HAD BEEN RENEWED AND INDIA HAD AGREED
TO TAKE MORE NEWSPRINT ALTHOUGH IT HAD AN ASSURED

SUPPLY FOR THREE OF FOUR YEARS FROM ELSEWHERE. THE
CREDIT AGREEMENT ALSO STANDS, ALTHOUGH HE SAID NO NEW
CREDITS HAD BEEN GRANTED. IN COMMENTING UPON THE
TWO MEETINGS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ADVISOR HUQ WITH PRIME
MINISTER DESAI IN DELHI DURING THE NON-ALIGNED CON-
FERENCE IN APRIL. DUBE SAID THAT THE MEETINGS WERE
MEANT TO CONVEY THE DESIRE FOR IMPROVED RELATIONS BUT
WERE NOT OCCASIONS OF SUBSTANTIVE DISCUSSION.

COMMENT: IN HIS SIX MONTHS AS JOINT SECRETARY FOR
BANGLADESH, DUBE HAS BEEN FAR MORE REASONABLE IN HIS
ASSESSMENTS OF BANGLADESH THAN HIS PREDECESSOR IN THE
JOB AND ATTEMPTED TO CONVEY THAT THE GOI UNDERSTANDS
THE PROBLEMS OF THE BANGLADESHIS AND SEEKS TO IMPROVE
RELATIONS. THROUGHOUT MOST OF HIS CONVERSATION WITH
US MAY 4 DUBE CONTINUED IN THE SAME VEIN. HOWEVER,
HIS REACTION TO THE CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WAS A HIGHLY
EMOTIONAL ONE AND HE BORDERED ON OUTRIGHT ANGER AT
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ANY VIEW THAT THE CHANGE MIGHT NOT AUTOMATICALLY
IMPERIL THE MINORITIES OF BANGLADESH.
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